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Public Information Workshops Scheduled on Emergency Relocation Of Columbian White-tailed Deer

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) will host public information workshops January 22 and January 23, 2013, to discuss its emergency plans to relocate up to 50 Columbian white-tailed deer from the Julia Butler Hanson (JBH) Refuge for Columbian White-tailed Deer near Cathlamet, Washington, to the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge near Ridgefield, Washington. Columbian white-tailed deer are protected under the federal Endangered Species Act as an endangered species.

The workshops are scheduled for January 22 at the Ridgefield Community Center, 210 N. Main Avenue, Ridgefield, Washington, 98642, and January 23 at the Sauvie Island Academy, 14445 NW Charlton Road, Portland, Oregon 97231.

The information sessions at both locations will be from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

The emergency translocation of the endangered deer is driven by the erosion and likely failure of the Steamboat Slough dike on the JBH Refuge. The dike, owned and maintained by Wahkiakum County Diking District #4, runs along the Columbia River boundary of the JBH refuge. It is eroding and engineers have said it could fail at any time.

A dike breach would inundate the JBH Refuge mainland unit and place the approximately 100 Columbian white-tailed deer on the Refuge at extreme risk. Managers believe that in the event of a breach and subsequent flooding many of these deer will be displaced or die, which would set back recovery efforts significantly. The proposed emergency translocation is an attempt to minimize loss of deer and maintain efforts toward recovery under the ESA. The deer that are not

moved from JBH would likely seek higher ground on the refuge but there is not enough habitat there to support the entire population of 100.

Engineers have said that repairing the failing dike would be expensive and temporary, given the geology of the riverbed at that location. Construction of a set-back dike by the US Army Corps of Engineers behind the failing dike is being considered but has not been approved by the Diking District or Wahkiakum County. Construction of this setback dike would also not be completed in time to prevent a potential dike breach this winter.

Columbian white-tailed deer are unique to western Washington and Oregon. Ridgefield NWR is within their historical range and contains suitable habitat. As part of the emergency effort, the Service has developed a Draft Environmental Assessment, which can be found on the JBH Refuge website at www.fws.gov/jbh. A Final Environmental Assessment, addressing comments received during the public comment period in December, will be published on the JBH Refuge website in early 2013.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov. Connect with our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/usfws, follow our tweets at www.twitter.com/usfwshq, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwshq>

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